

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



9.1 STATEMENT OF INTENT

We can keep our economy viable by enhancing Albany County's image and economic development opportunities.

9.2 BACKGROUND/EXISTING CONDITIONS

Our community recognizes the importance of keeping Albany County's economy viable. This means maintaining existing businesses and workers but also attracting new businesses and families. How do we do it? We can create an improved image and first impression and provide amenities that employees desire. Albany County already has many assets: a quality environment, great people, and affordable property values. However, many more assets could be developed.

Overall, there are many opportunities for economic development in Albany County. Within Albany County there are recently created opportunities for jobs: the University of Wyoming Energy School, new hotels, and other business. The Wyoming Business Technology Center, a business incubator that assists Wyoming entrepreneurs, was recently established on the University of Wyoming campus. The recent announcement of the National Center for Atmospheric Research's plans to build a \$60 million national supercomputing center in Cheyenne offers opportunities for new businesses and individuals working in weather, climate, and earth system sciences.

The Laramie Economic Development Corporation (LEDC), a non-profit public/private sector group, created a Partners in Progress initiative, which is aimed at job creation and community enhancement through expansion of existing businesses, recruitment of new businesses, support for entrepreneurial activities, and beautification projects. Specifically, they are working to create 800 new jobs that are above a wage of \$15.20/hour, focusing mainly on core-sector job development. This would benefit our community, particularly since a major concern is that our per capita income is \$4,000 below the national average.

Although there is a strong surge of energy and mineral money throughout the state of Wyoming, there are only limited mineral resources in Albany County. There are, however, many opportunities to expand renewable energy resources such as wind-energy development. Albany County is rich in wind resources with some areas of the county ranking in Wind Power Class 7, the highest power class, as determined by the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL).

There are also numerous opportunities for using tourism as a mechanism for economic development. The community of Centennial, at the base of the Snowy Range, is largely dependent on tourism. The Medicine Bow National Forest, located in three different regions around the county, is a major source of tourism as visitors come for outdoor recreation opportunities.

Taking away from these efforts and assets are the loss of our western rural character, highly visible properties with junk accumulations, and lack of building codes. New development patterns are encroaching on traditionally agricultural areas of the county. Residents have voiced numerous complaints about the appearance of the county. In particular, the complaints have been in regard to accumulated junk (inoperable vehicles, tires, unused building materials, garbage, etc.). Housing and other structures not built to a certain standard and inspected are often seen as unsafe.

9.3 LEGACY PROGRAM

Loss of the identity of Albany County is a concern for all residents and was a prominent issue conveyed during the Comprehensive Plan update process. The loss of character and identity removes what is special about our county, and it also has other implications. A unique character and identity is a tool to attract new businesses that will support current residents, children who want to continue to live here, and new residents. Wide open spaces, operating ranches, and beautiful scenery are part of what brings and keeps people here. A unique setting also appeals to new businesses and industries as an amenity to attract and retain employees. Losing our character and identity may dissuade new businesses from locating here.

The Legacy Program is based on our heritage and history. It creates a legacy to be left for our children and our future neighbors. This “legacy” is preserving our unique western character and enhancing our county identity. This approach has several components that interact together to improve our economic viability. An additional benefit of the Legacy Program is its contribution to the conservation of agricultural lands because these lands are a component of the western character of ranching and wide open spaces.

The Legacy Program:

- * Enhances county identity,
- * Promotes our western character,
- * Provides recreation opportunities,
- * Provides economic development opportunities,
- * Protects agricultural lands.



Components of the Legacy Program:

- * Western character promotion,
- * Highway corridor guidelines,
- * Albany County clean-up campaign,
- * Gateway concepts and sign regulation.

9.3.1 *RETAINING OUR WESTERN CHARACTER*

Part one of the Legacy Program is to promote the western character in Albany County through advertisements, signage, and actions. Since the State of Wyoming promotes this theme there is already a foundation in place. It is apparent in our everyday lifestyle and the symbolism that exists in our logos.

But, the promotion should include other community assets such as the quality of the environment. The Legacy Program emphasizes retaining our western character through development and land use decisions as growth occurs. For example, when a development proposal is reviewed in an Agricultural and Natural and Environmental Resources Area (see Chapter 3, Long Range Growth Plan and Land Use), one consideration might be, “is this development in character with Albany County’s character?” and then “If it is not compatible with our character, will it be detrimental to, or neutral to, our character?” The intention is not to force every development to be ‘western’ or to disallow other architectural styles or ideas. Instead, the consideration provides an opportunity to recognize our goal of preserving our character during the review of development projects and may influence decisions on the proposals that actually threaten our character.

There are multiple cultural resources in our county that give visitors the opportunity to experience our heritage (see Chapter 8, Cultural Resources). There are already outfitters and ranches that cater to tourism and promote the historic legacy. A new concept that builds on existing efforts is a trail system that links various historic places throughout the county. For example, a trail system could span from Centennial to Laramie and have stops at historic ranches along the way, or the existing city trail system could be extended. Trail head locations and trail alignments would need to be refined with cooperation from the public, but a plan can be established so when future development occurs, these trail heads and trail alignments can be retained or dedicated. To develop a trail system will require funding. The system will need to be modest until success and support grows, but funding could include donations, grants, general fund contributions, contributions made at the time of development, and eventually perhaps a dedicated tax. There may be an opportunity to combine funding and efforts with other public needs such as roads or utilities. Over time, the system can be established and a program to lead countywide expeditions, either privately or publicly run, can be formed and operated. (See Historic Trail System Map, Figure 7.1, Chapter 7, Open Space and Public Lands.)



9.3.2 HIGHWAY CORRIDOR GUIDELINES

The appearance of our highways, major roads, and rural lanes influences our character and identity and plays a role in economic development. New development patterns are changing our landscape and therefore changing the character of the county. Highway guidelines would encourage new development to be set back from the roadway. It is envisioned that the setback requirement would be relaxed in the Priority Growth Areas where parcels would be smaller and where development should be encouraged. Additionally, setbacks may vary if a property is not large enough to accommodate a standard setback or the setback places the structures on a portion of the property that has resources or environmental factors, such as wetlands and steep slopes, which are important to retain.

Billboards also detract from vistas and chop up the landscape. Billboards along Highway 287 and Interstate 80 were specifically identified during this update as negatively impacting vistas and compromising the character of the county. Highway corridor guidelines can frame how signage can exist without being detracting and provide parameters for billboard spacing, size, lighting, and appearance. We can conserve our county's character by limiting signage and determining building locations to highlight our assets.

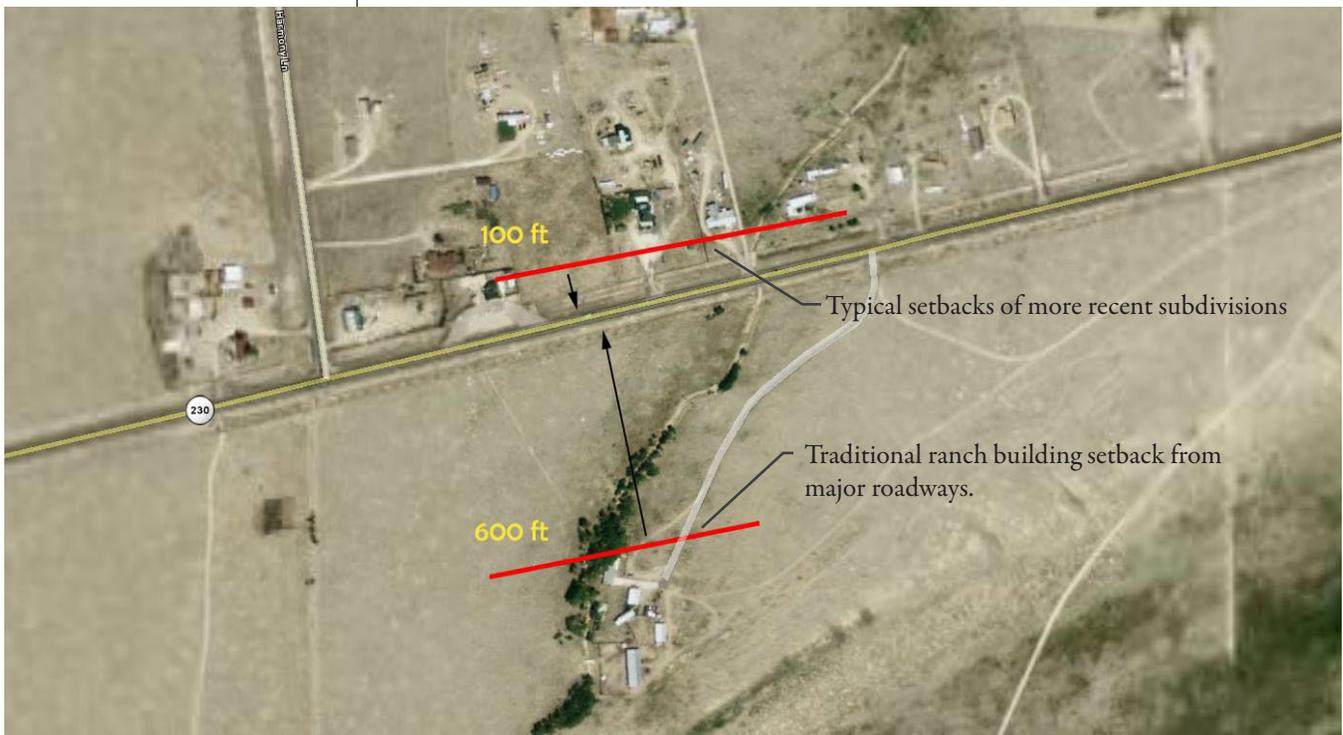


Figure 9.1: Corridor guidelines setback concept; locations along highways and other major roads



9.3.3 ALBANY COUNTY CLEAN-UP CAMPAIGN

The Legacy Program includes the Albany County clean-up campaign. The presence of inoperable vehicles, yard rubbish, and discarded building materials detracts from beautiful views, clutters the landscape, creates an eyesore for all of us, and poses safety and health concerns. Junk negatively impacts our identity; no one wants to be remembered for the abundance of trash and the run-down impression it imparts. Visitors may not decide to return because of this perceived image. Businesses and industries may choose a cleaner, more attractive place to locate. Plus, it conveys that we do not care about our community.

The Albany County clean-up campaign is intended to address this problem by encouraging our neighbors to be responsible without applying regulation to solve the problem. The Albany County campaign could be a series of advertisements and public information spots that present the issue to the community and share positive examples of what can be done and how it could be done. The County may need to adopt rubbish or junk regulations to address junk as well.

The County does not currently have a recycling program, and a looming problem in our future is the limited capacity of the City of Laramie landfill. The Albany County clean-up campaign can include efforts to begin a countywide recycling program. The county can also join forces with the City to address limitations to the existing landfill; either expanding existing facilities or creating a new landfill that will equally serve county residents.

9.3.4 GATEWAY CONCEPTS

Gateways such as the points where the Interstate 80 corridor, Highway 287, and Highway 34 cross into Albany County are the “front doors” to our community. These gateways indicate the entry into Albany County and provide visitors with an initial first impression of our community. We can design gateways to project a positive image of Albany County. Gateway identity monuments and signage at entries to the county will announce to everyone, visitors and residents alike, that they are now in Albany County, a unique place. Entry signs are a relatively small capital investment that can yield big results by associating the name of our community with a unique environment. Signs communicate a sense of place, rather than an insignificant landscape passed on the way to somewhere else. Signage will orient and inform visitors who are passing through Albany County and who would like to return to the beautiful and interesting landscape.

The signs should be designed as a package or family of signs. This means that materials, colors, and text styles on signs should have a similar look and feel. By doing so, the signs will be uniform, but not overly rigid or conforming. The signs should be constructed of permanent materials and incorporate the county logo and/or county name. The gateway concept can be extended throughout the county by establishing a hierarchy of signs from gateways through trails, etc. with kiosks and other areas to be determined. Albany County’s gateways should be designed so they are clearly identifiable and compatible with western character.



Key locations for gateway monuments near the Albany County border include:

- * Highway 287 south of Laramie,
- * Highway 210 east of Laramie,
- * Highway 34 northeast of Laramie,
- * Interstate 80 at the east and west entrances to the county,
- * Highway 130 west of Centennial,
- * Highway 30 west of Rock River,
- * Highway 13 west of Rock River.

Suggested gateway locations can be found on Map 9.1, Legacy Program Gateway Locations.

The gateway concept can be extended to land use review for areas around entrances and corridors into the city of Laramie such as South Third Street and Interstate 80 entries. In these areas, guidelines for development can be established with consideration of the location of the backs of buildings, landscaping, and design. A building front built of attractive materials that is nicely landscaped creates a more inviting entry to the city than loading zones and backs of buildings. As these areas would be within Priority Growth Area 1, implementation of such guidelines would be a joint effort between the County and City.

9.4 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OBJECTIVES

- ED1. Expand the economic and tax base of the county through economic development opportunities, while working toward diversification of the economy through environmentally-friendly, profitable basic industries and tourism.
- ED2. Promote renewable energy development while ensuring fair lease and rental



Figure 9.2: Sign hierarchy.



terms for landowners and support landowner initiatives to develop wind energy cooperatives. Work with landowners and other interested agencies to identify suitable locations for renewable energy development.

- ED3. Retain existing businesses by identifying and remedying strategic areas of economic deficiency. Encourage youths to remain in, or return to, the county to fill employment vacancies.
- ED4. Appeal to new businesses by promoting existing assets and enhancing first impressions of the county image.
- ED5. Improve the permitting process associated with business and industry development.
- ED6. Promote agriculture so that the sector remains as a contributor to the local economy.

9.5 IMPLEMENTATION

STRATEGIES

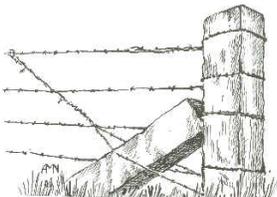
1. Encourage economic development initiatives that support tourism, continued agricultural use of land, and retention and expansion of existing businesses and industry.
2. Evaluate proposed growth in relation to the current and future capacity of resources, infrastructure, access, and services to development. (3)
 - * Consider community development implications in decisions about major capital improvements. (2, 3)
3. Continue to allow for home businesses in residential and agricultural zones while ensuring that the operation of home businesses does not adversely impact the visual and/or functional integrity of neighborhoods. Ensure that home businesses do not produce visual, environmental, or nuisance conditions that may lead to diminution of surrounding land values and/or restrain or interfere with the ability of surrounding residents to enjoy their land in a manner consistent with the zone. (1, 2)
4. Develop a “Return Home to Albany County” promotion program for the children of parents who reside in the county. This program could highlight career opportunities or provide educational or training programs for Albany County youth to encourage them to return to the county. (1)
5. Adopt building code regulations. (2)
6. Adopt an economic development plan. (1, 2, 3)
7. Adopt administrative review procedures for projects that demonstrate economic benefits. (1)
8. Promote economic development initiatives that are compatible with continued agricultural uses, for example, renewable energy development. (1, 3)



9. Work with the City of Laramie and LEDC to attract new economic opportunities to the Laramie area. (1)
10. Work with local economic groups, such as LEDC and county businesses, to market Albany County to northern Colorado. (1)
11. Implement the Legacy Program: (1, 2)

ACTIONS

- Adopt a home business permitting process that has clear standards and review processes. (1, 2)
- Adopt a building permit and plan review fee schedule. (2)
- Create building inspection and code enforcement positions. Consider contracting with the City of Laramie to fill these positions. (2)
- Adopt setbacks to preserve rural character. Provide mechanisms within the platting and subdivision regulations for the division of land which is agriculturally zoned that ensure the continuation of agricultural production and accommodate low intensity development. (1, 3)
- Develop an open space and trails master plan. (1)
- Institute unique western character promotion, (1, 2)
- Develop and adopt highway corridor guidelines, (1, 2)
- Support clean-up efforts, (1, 2)
 - Adopt a junk and nuisance ordinance addressing inoperable vehicles, tires, unused building materials, weeds, rubbish and garbage, etc.
- Establish gateway concepts, (1, 2)
 - Commission a graphic artist or signage consultant to confirm gateway locations and develop design concepts and cost estimates.
 - Explore corporate sponsorship for a signage program.
 - Make a comprehensive effort to coordinate graphic imagery used to market Albany County, including logos and signs.
 - Work with WYDOT on gateway concepts as well as aesthetic design guidelines for highways, bridges, and other projects.
 - Institute billboard design review.
 - Develop design guidelines for properties around Laramie.



9.6 RELATED DOCUMENTS

City of Laramie Comprehensive Plan: guides land use planning and development within the city and in an Urban Growth Area around the city, includes initiatives related to economic development (2007)

Partners in Progress: economic development initiative created through the Laramie Economic Development Corporation (2001)

